

Changing images of Shinto: *Sanja takusen* or the three oracles

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Introduction

'The Oracles of the Three Shrines' (*sanja takusen*) are three short oracular utterances attributed to the shrine deities of Ise, Hachiman and Kasuga.¹ In practice, *sanja takusen* usually means the three oracle texts as they appear inscribed or printed on a hanging scroll. Versions of the *sanja takusen* scroll have been known in Japan for almost six hundred years. The deity of Ise (Amaterasu, Tenshō Kōtaijingū) usually forms the central focus, flanked by Hachiman lower down to the right and Kasuga to the left.² The various examples of the scroll are by no means identical but they bear a sufficiently strong 'family resemblance' to one another for the *sanja takusen* to be regarded as an iconographical unity. All versions of the scroll contain at least one, usually two and occasionally all three of the following elements: the names or titles of the three shrines; one to three oracular texts (*takusen*); one or more images of the personified deities of the shrines.

Two very different versions of the *sanja takusen* (illustrated in Figs. 1 & 2) will be discussed in this chapter. One version dates from before, and one after, the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This year was a watershed for Japanese religion because of the phenomenon of 'dissociation of kami and buddhas' (*shinbutsu bunri*, *shinbutsu hanzen*) which generated radically new and separate forms of Shinto iconography, ritual and doctrines. The history of the *sanja takusen* graphically illustrates the impact of *shinbutsu bunri* on the Japanese religious landscape.

The standard (pre-Meiji) form of the *sanja takusen*

In the booklet *Basic Terms of Shinto* published by Kokugakuin University, the *sanja takusen* is described as follows:

Oracles of the three deities Amaterasu Ōmikami, Hachiman Daibosatsu and Kasuga Daimyōjin. According to legend, the oracles appeared on the

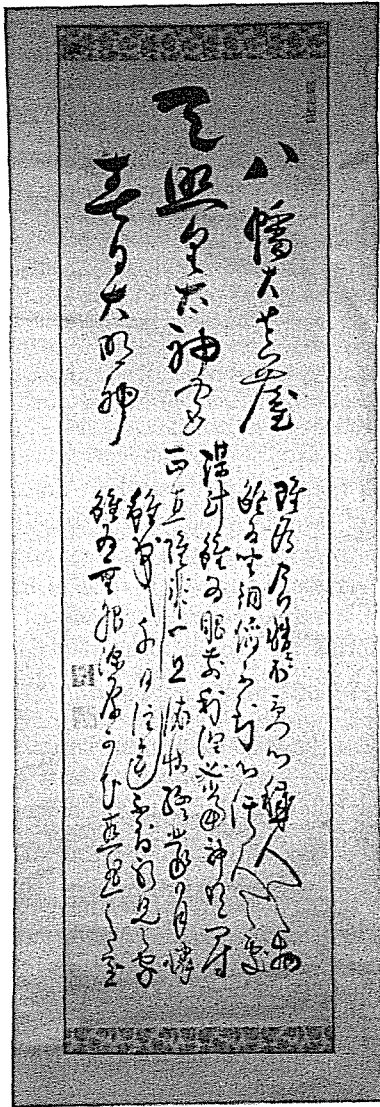


Figure 1 *sanja takusen*
(Edo period)



Figure 2 *sanja takusen*
(Meiji period)

surface of the pond at Tōdaiji in Nara during the Shōō era (1288–92). The oracles came to form the basis of moral teachings concerning pureness of mind, honesty and benevolence, and also contributed to the formulation and spread of Shinto doctrine.³

Fig. 1 shows an example of what I refer to as the 'standard' (pre-1868) form of the *sanja takusen*. The scroll shown here dates from the Edo period and was inscribed by the Zen Buddhist monk Kōgan (1748–1821).⁴ It is virtually identical in content and layout to innumerable other examples of the scroll produced by priests, artists, calligraphers and publishers from the late fourteenth century onwards. At the head of the scroll are the names and titles of the three shrine-deities⁵ (centre: Tenshō Kōtaijingū, right: Hachiman Daibosatsu, left: Kasuga Daimyōjin). Arranged below the shrine-names are the three oracular texts, one for each shrine, which will be discussed in more detail below. There are many minor variations on the standard form of the *sanja takusen*. Sometimes only the names of the deities are inscribed, and one or other of Hachiman and Kasuga may occasionally be described as *daijin* (great kami) rather than *daibosatsu* and *daimyōjin*. The oracle texts, too, are subject to minor variations and in later versions pictures are sometimes added to, or replace, the text of the oracles.

An English translation of the three oracles in the standard form of the *sanja takusen* appeared for the first time in 1985 in *The World of Shinto*, an anthology published by the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai.⁶ The translation of the three oracles in *The World of Shinto* corresponds broadly to the standard type of *sanja takusen* scroll shown in Fig. 1 and runs as follows:

Hachiman Daibosatsu

Though one might attempt to eat a red-hot ball of iron, one must never eat the food of a person with an impure mind. Though one might sit above a blazing fire hot enough to melt copper, one must never go into the place of a person of polluted mind. This is for the sake of purity.

Tenshō Kōtaijingū

If you plot and connive to deceive men, you may fool them for a while, and profit thereby, but you will without fail be visited by divine punishment. To be utterly honest may have the appearance of inflexibility and self-righteousness, but in the end, such a person will receive the blessings of sun and moon. Follow honesty without fail.

Kasuga Daimyōjin

Even though it be the home of someone who has managed for long to avoid misfortune, the gods will not enter into the place of a person with perverse disposition. On the other hand, even though a man be in mourning for his father and mother, if he be a man of compassion, the gods will enter in there. Compassion is all-important.

This, with minor variations,⁷ represents the text of the oracles found in most examples of the *sanja takusen* scroll and in the commentarial works relating to it from the late fourteenth century up to the Meiji restoration of 1868.⁸ The *sanja takusen* scroll was extremely popular in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) and its ideas, if not its traditional form, retained their influence into the twentieth century. According to one of my elderly informants in central Japan,

the moral teachings embodied in the scroll represented '*ippanteki*' (widespread, popular) notions of religiosity during his own childhood in the 1920s.

The post-Meiji form of the *sanja takusen*

Figure 2 shows a quite different version of the *sanja takusen* scroll: the 'post-Meiji' form. This example features the same three shrines of Ise, Hachiman and Kasuga. Though superficially resembling the pre-Meiji version and readily identifiable as a *sanja takusen*,⁹ it is significantly different from the standard form. For one thing this version, which probably dates from the late Meiji period (c. 1900), includes pictures of the three deities in a 'pure Shinto' style almost certainly unknown before 1868 and purposely devoid of the Buddhist iconographical features present in illustrated versions of the standard *sanja takusen* scroll. Most significantly, the text of the oracles is different in every respect from the 'standard' wording given above. The text in the post-Meiji version is drawn from the *Nihon shoki*, the eighth century 'Chronicle of Japan.' Three new passages replace the oracle texts on purity, honesty and compassion with the following narrative texts, known in modern Shinto as the *sanchoku* or 'three imperial commands'.

Amaterasu Sumeōmikami commanded her August Grandchild, saying: 'This Reed-plain-1500-autumns-fair-rice-ear Land is the region which my descendants shall be lords of. Do thou, my August Grandchild, proceed thither and govern it. Go! and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure for ever.'

Amaterasu Sumeōmikami took in her hand the precious mirror, and, giving it to Ame no Oshihomimi no Mikoto, uttered a prayer, saying: 'My child, when thou lookest upon this mirror, let it be as if thou wert looking on me. Let it be with thee on thy couch and in thy hall, and let it be to thee a holy mirror.'

Takami-musubi no Kami accordingly gave command, saying: 'I will set up a Heavenly divine fence and a Heavenly rock-boundary wherein to practise religious abstinence on behalf of my descendants. Do ye, Ame no Koyane no Mikoto and Futodama no Mikoto, take with you the Heavenly divine fence, and go down to the Central Land of Reed-Plains. Moreover, ye will there practise abstinence on behalf of my descendants.'¹⁰

The three shrines (*sanja*)

In *sanja takusen* scrolls the deity of Ise is flanked by Kasuga and the warlike Hachiman. The three deities and their oracles constitute a triad; an iconographic arrangement found often in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist

contexts and frequently encountered in Japanese religious art. In his detailed study of the Amida triad at Zenkōji, McCallum observes that:

The triad format, fundamental in East Asian Buddhist art, is based, of course, on the idea that each of the major Buddhas is accompanied by two attendant Bodhisattvas. The arrangement, with a central Buddha figure flanked on either side by a Bodhisattva, leads to a particularly satisfying symmetrical composition that appears to touch deep psychological roots. . . . Practically all triads belong to one of two basic categories: in one type the central Buddha figure is seated in the lotus position, flanked by standing Bodhisattvas; in the other all three figures are standing. . . . the available evidence suggests that the seated-central-Buddha type was most popular in early Japan, whereas the three-figures-standing type had the greatest popularity in Korea.¹¹

The triadic motif of the *sanja takusen* with Amaterasu in the centre is prefigured at the mythopoeic level in the earliest *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* accounts by the legend that the sun deity Amaterasu, born from water, is associated with two male siblings.

It is widely known that water is the source of life and growth, and that water, moon and women form the popular symbolical orbit of fertility. We recall that the two brothers of Amaterasu are Tsukiyomi (moon-counting) and Susanoo (impetuous-man): the former is to reign over the world of darkness or night, while the latter the ocean or Netherland. Accordingly, it seems that Amaterasu, Tsukiyomi, and Susanoo form a triad that is closely associated with agricultural life.¹²

As well as the psychological factors, mythological connotations and iconographic traditions which inform the triadic arrangement of the *sanja takusen*, we can note that the specific triad of the three shrines of Ise, Hachiman and Kasuga has a religious, political and symbolic significance which almost certainly predates the linking of these three shrines, the *sanja*, with their associated three oracle texts.

The Iwashimizu shrine of the bodhisattva Hachiman, positioned on a mountain protecting the south-west direction of Kyoto, was established in 859 by the monk Gyōkyō. Hachiman, identified with the legendary Emperor Ōnin, his wife and his mother, was venerated by the imperial court and subsequently by the Minamoto clan. The Kasuga shrine, now called the Kasuga Taisha (Kasuga Grand Shrine), is located in Nara. Until 1868 the shrine formed part of what Grapard calls a 'multiplex' – a combined shrine-temple complex whose major integrated elements were the Kasuga shrine and the Kofukuji Buddhist temple.¹³ The deity of the entire sacred area, Kasuga Daimyōjin (the Great Deity of Kasuga), was amongst other things the ancestral shrine-deity of the powerful Fujiwara clan who dominated the imperial court from the tenth to the twelfth centuries.

'The Ise shrine' may, according to context, refer to one or both of the Inner and Outer Shrines (Naikū and Gekū respectively) which constitute the

imperial household shrine at Ise. The Inner Shrine houses Amaterasu Ōmikami (also read Tenshō Kōtaijin), grandmother of Ninigi, the legendary unifier of Japan, and great-grandmother of the legendary first Japanese Emperor Jinmu. Under the influence of Watarai Shinto, the 'Ise' deity was successfully identified with the Outer Shrine, the pilgrimage destination which was under Watarai control.¹⁴

Within what the historian Kuroda Toshio has called the medieval *kenmitsu* (exoteric-esoteric) system, the great shrine-temple complexes sanctified and thereby legitimated their own power and that of other elite groups such as the Fujiwara, the imperial court and the bakufu through the rituals and doctrines of esoteric Buddhism. Under the *kenmitsu* system the meaning of each of the three shrines was primarily Buddhist and the shrine-deities were part of the Buddhist pantheon.¹⁵ Hachiman's title of *Daibosatsu* (Great Bodhisattva) is used in most standard versions of the *sanja takusen* and the Iwashimizu Hachiman shrine was first and foremost the shrine of a Great Bodhisattva. The usual title of the shrine-deity of Kasuga in the *sanja takusen* is *Daimyōjin* (great illumined divinity), a term whose meaning is not limited to 'Shinto' or 'Buddhist' contexts. The Kasuga divinity was also known by the Buddhist name of *Jihimangyo bosatsu*, 'Bodhisattva of rounded practice of compassion.'¹⁶

Ise seems to represent a slightly different case. Buddhist rituals and even Buddhist terminology were officially prohibited in the precincts of the shrine, though pilgrimages to the shrine by Buddhist priests were commonplace. However, the Tendai-Zen monk Mujū Ichien, in his work *Shasekishū*, tells how during his pilgrimage to the Ise shrine in the Kōchō era (1261-4) a shrine official explained to him the reason for the taboos on Buddhism:

In antiquity when this province did not exist, the deity of the Great Shrine [Amaterasu], guided by a seal of the Great Sun Buddha [Dainichi Nyorai, Mahāvairocana] inscribed on the ocean floor, thrust down her august spear. Brine from the spear coagulated like drops of dew, and this was seen from afar by Māra, the Evil One, in the Sixth Heaven of Desire. 'It appears that these drops are forming into a land where Buddhism will be propagated and people will escape from the round of birth-and-death,' he said, and came down to prevent it. Then the deity of the Great Shrine met with the demon king. 'I promise not to utter the names of the Three Treasures, nor will I permit them near my person. Therefore, quickly return back to the heavens.' When she had thus mollified him, he withdrew. Not wishing to violate that august promise, monks to this day do not approach the sacred shrine, and the sutras are not carried openly in its precincts. Things associated with the Three Treasures are referred to obliquely: Buddha is called 'The Cramp-Legged One' [*tachisukumi*]; the sutras, 'coloured paper' [*somegami*]; monks, 'longhairs' [*kaminaga*]; and temples, 'incense burners' [*koritaki*], etc.

Mujū concludes, in typical *kenmitsu* style:

Outwardly the deity is estranged from the Dharma, but inwardly she profoundly supports the Three Treasures. Thus, Japanese Buddhism is under the special protection of the deity of the Great Shrine.¹⁷

Broadly speaking, these 'top three' shrines represented the major centres of spiritual-temporal power in medieval Japan.¹⁸ They were already understood to form a quintessential grouping before the *sanja takusen* oracle scroll emerged. According to Tyler, the thirteenth-century *Gukanshō* and fourteenth-century *Jinnō shōtōki* both reflect a public, generally accepted view that Amaterasu had made an agreement with Kasuga which came to fruition in the close connection of the emperor with the Fujiwara ministers; later Hachiman (the Minamoto clan) joined these two deities and their clans in agreement over rulership of the country.¹⁹ A fourteenth-century painting resembling a *sanja takusen* but without the oracle texts shows the resourceful Emperor Go-Daigo (r. 1318–39) seated as a Buddhist priest. In each hand the emperor holds a *vajra*, a symbol of esoteric Buddhism, while above him like a canopy are the titles of the 'three shrines'; Ise, Hachiman and Kasuga. The image is evidently meant to portray Go-Daigo as an emperor whose sacred authority derives from Buddhism and whose rule is endorsed by the three most significant shrine-deities.²⁰ It seems that by the time the *sanja takusen* first appeared, probably in the early part of the Ōei era (1394–1428), the character and significance of the 'three shrines' motif was already well established.

The Three Oracles

Oracles are brief, authoritative utterances by deities, issued usually in response to a specific request. Oracles occupy an important role in many religious traditions, including Buddhism, and techniques for obtaining oracles vary widely. Well-known pivotal events in Japanese history provided several significant examples of Buddhist priests using specialised techniques to seek oracular guidance from deities. In 735, Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–49) resolved to set up a great statue of Roshana (Vairocana) in what was to become the Tōdaiji in Nara. In 742, with the project still incomplete, the Buddhist priest Gyōgi (668–749) travelled to Ise to seek oracular reassurance that the erection of the statue would not offend the native divinities.

Carrying a holy Buddhist relic, Gyōgi journeyed as an imperial envoy to the great shrine of the Sun Goddess in Ise, to take her opinion as to the erection and worship of the great Buddha by the emperor . . . who was according to the native creed her descendant and her vice-regent upon earth. Gyōgi, then an aged man, after seven days and seven nights spent in prayer at the threshold of her shrine, received an oracle from her divine lips. Using (if we may believe the records) the astonishing medium of Chinese verse, she proclaimed in a loud voice that the sun of truth illumined the long night of life and death and that

the moon of reality dispersed the clouds of sin and ignorance; that the news of the emperor's project was as welcome to her as a boat at a ferry, and the offering of the relic as grateful to her as a torch in the darkness . . . The Oracle was duly interpreted as favourable, and it was confirmed shortly afterwards by a dream in which the Sun Goddess appeared to the emperor as a radiant disc, and proclaimed that the Sun and the Buddha were the same.²¹

When in 749 Emperor Shōmu abdicated to become a novice monk in favour of his daughter Kōken (r. 749–58), a second oracle was reported from a kami called Hachiman enshrined at Usa in Kyushu. Hachiman expressed a desire to travel to the capital. His palanquin, the prototype of the *mikoshi*, was met on the road by a retinue of high officials, received at the capital and installed in a special shrine. A high-born priestess of the Hachiman shrine (who was also a Buddhist nun) then worshipped in the Tōdaiji in a ceremony attended by the whole court, including the retired Shōmu, his daughter the Empress Kōken and five thousand monks. Dances were performed and 'a cap of the first grade was conferred upon the god.' Subsequently extensive lands were granted to the Tōdaiji.

Empress Kōken abdicated in turn in 758, but from 764 to 770 reoccupied the throne under the name of Empress Shōtoku, appointing her Rasputin-like advisor, the monk Dōkyō, to be minister of state. Dōkyō soon rose to the unprecedented rank of Hōō (Dharma-king, 'Pope'), but then went too far. Recalling Hachiman's triumphal entry into Nara two decades earlier, Dōkyō announced that a further oracle had been issued by Hachiman via a medium, this time to the effect that if Dōkyō were made emperor, the country would enjoy perpetual tranquillity. The empress, however, sent her envoy Wake no Kiyomaro to consult Hachiman. The envoy returned to say that Dōkyō, not being of imperial blood, could not succeed to the throne. A furious Dōkyō had Wake no Kiyomaro exiled but when the empress died the following year Dōkyō fell from power.²² Epic interventions such as these confirmed the bodhisattva-deity Hachiman to be a significant and authoritative source of oracular utterances.

Recent Japanese research on the *sanja takusen* suggests that the three oracles brought together in the standard *sanja takusen* scroll probably began life as separate Buddhist oracles;²³ they were just three of many attributed to Hachiman and referred to in various sources. According to the legend mentioned earlier, the Oracles of the Three Shrines (though in what form is unclear) first appeared miraculously floating on the surface of a pond at the Tōdaiji during the Shōō era, 1288–93.²⁴ Why the oracles should have appeared in a pond is not explained, though there are many legends in Japan of treasures entering this world from the underwater realm,²⁵ and buried or otherwise concealed scriptures are a feature of esoteric and Mahayana Buddhism. The earliest description of a *sanja takusen* proper occurs over a century later than its legendary first appearance, in a work called the *Daigo shiyōshō* produced around the end of the Ōei period (1394–1428). Mention of the oracles in the *Daigo shiyōshō* suggests that the *sanja takusen* was connected in some way with

Buddhist priests of the southern capital and specifically with the priestly lineage group of the Daigoji temple.²⁶

The southern court and capital was established in Yoshino by Emperor Go-Daigo in 1336 while Ashikaga Takauji set up the competing Emperor Kōmyō in Kyoto, following the end of the Hōjō regency and the destruction of Kamakura in 1333. Daigoji, head temple of the Daigo branch of Shingon Buddhism, is located in Fushimi ward, Kyoto. Daigo (*ghee*) refers to the fifth and most clarified period of the Buddha's teachings (literally, the quintessential teachings). The temple, established in 874–6 was visited by the first Emperor Daigo in 907 and maintained links with the imperial court thereafter. The prevailing view is that the oracles included in the *sanja takusen* were already circulating in the thirteenth or fourteenth century and the *sanja takusen* proper had appeared at the latest by 1409. The oracle now attributed to Hachiman, for example, is quoted (with approval) by the thirteenth-century monk Nichiren (1222–82) as a *takusen* of Kasuga.²⁷ The *sanja takusen* was therefore produced within the context of 'Ryōbu Shinto', Shinto of the two mandalas, that is to say, within the *kenmitsu* exoteric-esoteric system of thought and practice which interpreted the kami or other locally enshrined deities as traces or manifestations (*suijaku*) of the basic buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji*). The medieval *sanja takusen* motif affirmed the interdependence of Buddhism, the shrine-deities and the imperial institution within an overall *kenmitsu* world-view.

The *sanja takusen* and the meaning of shrines

Shrines and sacred places of many different kinds are found throughout Japan. There is generally little dispute about what constitutes a shrine or where shrines are located;²⁸ the important question to be asked is always 'what does a shrine mean?' The meaning of shrines, whether ancient or recently-established, has been constantly redefined and renegotiated throughout Japanese history. An important function of the *sanja takusen* as indicated above was to establish the meaning of the three major shrines – and by extension all shrines – within an overall *kenmitsu* religious world-view. The 'standard' version of the *sanja takusen* shown in Fig. 1 does this by relating each of the three shrines to one of three 'inner' spiritual and behavioural qualities or virtues already prominent in Buddhist canonical thought. Hachiman enjoins purity (*shōjō*), Ise honesty (*shōjiki*) and Kasuga compassion (*jihī*). 'Outer' (ritual or physical) pollution and purity are not so important; what is decisive is the inner state of mind. In the oracle of Kasuga, for example, it is made clear that the 'inner' Buddhist virtue of a compassionate mind far outweighs the effect of any external ritual pollution, even the most severe pollution attaching to the death of one's own parents: '... even though a man be in mourning for his father and mother, if he be a man of compassion, the gods will enter in there. Compassion is all-important.'

If the idea that the three great shrines promoted the inner virtues of purity, honesty and compassion had been restricted to the *kenmitsu* Buddhist thought of the Daigoji lineage and the southern court, the 'Oracles of the Three Shrines' as a religious icon might have disappeared from view before long. However, in the late fifteenth century the *sanja takusen* motif was appropriated anew by the entrepreneurial shrine priest Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511).²⁹ Born into the twenty-first generation of the Yoshida or Urabe priestly family, Kanetomo inherited responsibilities for the Yoshida shrine in Kyoto at a time when the court nobility was increasingly unable to support this shrine to the ujigami (tutelary deity) of the Fujiwara clan. Kanetomo accordingly developed what we would now call a 'new religion' called *Genpon Sōgen Shinto* ('Shinto of the Original Source') based at the shrine. Incorporating all the major elements of the *kenmitsu* system and adapting Shingon rituals, Ryōbu Shinto and Chinese five-elements theory Kanetomo asserted that the myriads of kami in Japan, the *yaoyorozu no kami*, formed a unity (the 'original source'), rather than an unconnected pantheon, and that this unity of gods should be worshipped at his own shrine on Mount Yoshida. For this reason Yoshida Shinto is also known as '*Yuiitsu Shinto*' ('unique,' 'peerless' or 'unitarian Shinto').

Kanetomo was studious as well as enterprising. In two major works *Shinto taii* ('The gist of Shinto') and *Yuiitsu Shintō myōbō yōshū* ('An anthology of the doctrines of peerless Shinto'), he sought to establish the Yoshida line as the arbiters of shrine orthodoxy in Japan. In 1489 Kanetomo attracted the vigorous hostility of the Ise priesthood when he had the temerity to announce that the deity of Ise had transferred its residence to the Yoshida shrine. Kanetomo also associated the Yoshida shrine with the imperial household, for example by conducting memorial services for the imperial family using a *sanja takusen* scroll personally inscribed by the emperor.³⁰ Kanetomo's world-view, heavily influenced by Buddhism and Chinese thought and entirely consistent with the import of the *sanja takusen*, held that the *kami* (deities), *rei* (spirit) and *kokoro* (human heart or mind) comprised a form of absolute existence 'prior to the creation of heaven and earth.' The meaning of the shrines, according to the new Yoshida teaching, was intimately bound up with the inner spiritual state of the worshipper.

'Yoshida Shinto' was extremely successful. As a result of Kanetomo's initiatives and the efforts of his successors, the Yoshida family had by the end of the fifteenth century secured the right to award ranks to all shrines and priests throughout the country, with the exception of a few shrines with close links with the imperial household. This privilege was retained until 1868 when all such shrine licensing privileges passed to central government. Because the *sanja takusen* was used to spread the ideas of Yoshida Shinto, Yoshida Shinto was also extremely influential in the dissemination and popularisation of the *sanja takusen* motif, which consequently became known throughout Japan. From the fifteenth century onwards knowledge of the scroll and its contents spread from the imperial family to the samurai classes and the common people,

with the help of comprehensible *waka* verse renditions of the oracles (which are written in classical Chinese) and through simple explanatory books. So completely did the *sanja takusen* become identified with the teachings of Yoshida Shinto that the eighteenth-century scholar Ise Sadatake (1717–84) even came to the conclusion that Kanetomo had forged the *sanja takusen* for his own benefit in order to propagate Yoshida Shinto.³¹

Despite such doubts cast upon the authenticity of the *sanja takusen*, the scroll was widely regarded as having a positive moral influence, and the *sanja takusen* continued to receive endorsement – even as a pious forgery – from most religious quarters throughout the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) because of the encouragement it offered to popular piety and the cultivation of virtue. Dissemination of the scroll in the Edo period was supported by popular Shintoists, by followers of the Shingaku ('heart-learning') movement founded by Ishida Baigan and by others connected with Buddhism who supported the 'unity of the Three Teachings' of Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism. Zen priests made copies of the *sanja takusen* (including the example shown in Fig. 2), among them Hakuin (1685–1768), whose boldly inscribed calligraphy of the *sanja takusen* shrine titles is now preserved in the Jingū Chōkokan museum at Ise. Up to the Meiji restoration large quantities of commentarial works, scroll pictures and prints related to the *sanja takusen* were mass-produced, devotional rituals and services were organised, and votive lanterns were dedicated to the 'three shrines' in various areas.³²

The oracle of Amaterasu in the standard version of the *sanja takusen* can be invoked to affirm the value of honest uprightness as opposed to magic and corrupt extravagance; this idea was linked in the popular mind during the Edo period with the simplicity of the Ise shrine architecture. The oracles were also widely used in *okina* plays at village festivals.³³ Nagashima observes that although scholars of Kokugaku ('National Learning') may have disliked the 'reek of Buddhism' (*hotoke-kusai*) attached to the *sanja takusen*, they nevertheless seem to have accepted it, thus conforming to the custom of revering 'Shinto' and 'Buddhist' elements together.³⁴ Mori goes so far as to refer to 'a *sanja takusen* faith which deeply permeated the whole country and had not declined up to recent times,' though this does beg the question of what the '*sanja takusen* faith' meant in practice at different times for different people.³⁵ The popularity of the scroll over many centuries and within many different religious contexts is thus testament to the broad and enduring appeal in Japan of *kenmitsu*-type Buddhist ideas which stress the cultivation of inner virtues.

There is evidence to suggest that during the course of the Tokugawa period and possibly much earlier, the *sanja takusen* became closely associated with the pilgrimage to Ise. This practice was fostered by the priests and pilgrim-masters (*oshi*) of the Ise Outer Shrine. Pilgrimage to Ise depended on interpretations of the meaning of the shrines supplied by the Watarai priestly lineage at Ise, interpretations which eventually outstripped in popular appeal those of Yoshida Shinto. The Watarai clan were responsible for the Outer Shrine (Gekū), which until the Meiji restoration eclipsed the Inner Shrine (Naikū) as a

focus of religious devotion. According to Watarai teachings, the deities of the Ise shrines – including of course Amaterasu – were the source of ‘original enlightenment’ or innate purity (the Buddhist notion of *hongaku*). Consequently, a pilgrimage to Ise or participation in rituals associated with Ise organised by the *oshi* became a means of self-purification, progress towards enlightenment and the uncovering of the inborn spiritual virtues of purity, honesty and compassion enjoined by the deities in the *sanja takusen*.³⁶

It seems likely that pre-Meiji illustrated examples of the *sanja takusen* (i.e., scrolls which feature personified images of the deities in addition to their titles, and sometimes in place of the text of the oracles) emerged in connection with the flourishing pilgrimage trade in Ise. This in turn may have led to more emphasis on the central figure of Amaterasu and the shrine of Ise in the *sanja takusen* and diminished concern for the contents of the oracle texts and the other two shrines of Hachiman and Kasuga. A number of late Tokugawa examples of the *sanja takusen* show the titles of the shrines and (Buddhist-style) images of the three deities, without the oracle texts. This may be because the ideas expressed in the oracles had become unfashionable or, more prosaically, that the medieval Chinese texts could no longer be understood by pilgrims and others buying the scroll. It might even be argued that the oracles were so well known that they had no need to be spelled out. Whatever the reason, the space previously occupied by the standard oracles was soon to be inscribed with new meanings.

The *sanja takusen* after the Meiji restoration of 1868

The ‘post-Meiji’ scroll shown in Fig. 2 differs from the standard *sanja takusen* of Fig. 1 in all three aspects (titles, texts and images). It reflects very clearly the ‘separation of kami and buddhas’ (*shinbutsu hanzen, shinbutsu bunri*) formally promulgated within a few months of the Meiji restoration, and consolidated throughout subsequent decades up to 1945. Firstly, the titles of the shrine-deities are regularised in a non-Buddhist form. Kasuga and Hachiman’s titles, formerly Daimyōjin and Daibosatsu become, like that of Amaterasu, Daijin or ‘Great Kami’ (also read Ōkami). Secondly, as earlier indicated, the three *sanchoku* passages from the *Nihon shoki* take the place of the ‘purity, honesty and compassion’ oracles of the standard *sanja takusen*. Finally, modern pictures of the deities have been added to the scroll.

The renaming and retitling of deities and shrines was a major preoccupation of the new Shinto administrators of the early Meiji period. Shrine officials throughout the country were requested in 1868 to submit a history of their shrine and its traditional Buddhist associations so that the process of ‘dissociating’ the kami from Buddhism could then take place. Thousands of shrines with Buddhist names, or which enshrined Buddhist or other ‘non-Japanese’ deities such as Myōken, were renamed or their deities replaced.³⁷ The retitling of Kasuga and Hachiman in the post-Meiji version of the *sanja*

takusen reflects this process. The title *daijin* for Hachiman or Kasuga is found in some pre-Meiji *sanja takusen*, but after the Meiji Restoration use of 'Great Bodhisattva' (*daibosatsu*) for a kami such as Hachiman was prohibited. Many of the new names were drawn from the ancient chronicles, which had been rediscovered during the Edo period by Kokugaku, in particular the *Kojiki* or Record of Ancient Matters completed in 712. This text was considered by scholars and champions of National Learning to be the most authentic repository of pre-Buddhist Japanese culture.

In the case of the Kasuga-Kōfukuji 'multiplex' in Nara, its deity Kasuga Daimyōjin now became the kami of the Kasuga shrine alone, separate from Kōfukuji. Grapard describes the day in 1868 on which kami and buddhas were 'separated' at Kasuga and the monks of the Kōfukuji instantly became Shinto priests.³⁸ The Bodhisattva Hachiman comprised, in addition to his Buddhist identities, the Emperor Ōjin, his wife Himegami and his mother, the warlike Empress Jingū. Before 1868 Hachiman was often represented as a Buddhist priest. After 1868 he was no longer a 'Great Bodhisattva' – instead, his identity became essentially that of the deified Emperor Ōjin. In the post-Meiji *sanja takusen* in Fig. 2 he is depicted as *yumiya* Hachiman, 'bow and arrow Hachiman,' the god of archery and war.

The texts of the oracles in the post-Meiji *sanja takusen* shown in Fig. 2 perform the same function as the texts in the 'standard' version; they establish the meaning of shrines. However, the meaning of the shrines has now changed. The layout of the three oracle texts in the post-Meiji version of the *sanja takusen* suggests that they are not expressly linked to the three deities, and in fact all the texts are related solely to Ise and its deity Amaterasu (now shorn of all Buddhist associations). The first section of text is implicitly concerned with the recent 'restoration' of the emperor to power. It deals with the legitimacy and authority of the imperial line, which is established here by the divine command of Amaterasu to the first of her descendants.

Amaterasu Sumeōmikami commanded her August Grandchild, saying: 'This Reed-plain-1500-autumns-fair-rice-ear Land is the region which my descendants shall be lords of. Do thou, my August Grandchild, proceed thither and govern it. Go! and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure for ever.'

The second section explains the divine significance of the Grand Shrine of Ise, where the sacred mirror, one of the three Imperial Regalia of mirror, sword and jewels, is enshrined. After the Meiji restoration, all Japanese citizens were defined as parishioners (*ujiko*) of local shrines and simultaneously as *ujiko* of the Ise shrine. The text explains how the emperor's association with the Ise shrine, which now stood at the apex of a national hierarchy of shrines,³⁹ offers him privileged and direct access to the divine ancestress.

Amaterasu Sumeōmikami took in her hand the precious mirror, and, giving it to Ame no Oshihomimi no Mikoto, uttered a prayer, saying:

'My child, when thou lookest upon this mirror, let it be as if thou wert looking on me. Let it be with thee on thy couch and in thy hall, and let it be to thee a holy mirror.'

The final section describes the origin and purpose of a shrine (minimally a sacred area defined by a fence or boundary). Early in the Meiji period the ritual calendar of local shrines was revised and newly calibrated with the ritual cycle of the imperial household shrines. This created a link between local shrines, the 'national' Ise shrine and the divinised figure of the emperor. The meaning of local and national shrine ritual is redefined in this new version of the scroll as rites on behalf of the imperial line rather than private communion with the shrine undertaken for the benefit of the individual or his or her local community.⁴⁰

Takami-musubi no Kami accordingly gave command, saying: 'I will set up a Heavenly divine fence and a Heavenly rock-boundary wherein to practise religious abstinence on behalf of my descendants. Do ye, Ame no Koyane no Mikoto and Futodama no Mikoto, take with you the Heavenly divine fence, and go down to the Central Land of Reed-Plains. Moreover, ye will there practise abstinence on behalf of my descendants.'

Finally, the new-style pictures of the three 'Great Kami' (Ōkami, Daijin) epitomise the 'separation of kami and buddhas' that occurred in the Meiji period. Hachiman, riding a horse, carries no hint of his bodhisattva past; he may even be thought to bear some resemblance to the Emperor Meiji, though perhaps accidentally.⁴¹ Kasuga, mounted on a deer, is similarly devoid of any Buddhist imagery. The association of the deer (actual and symbolic) at Kasuga with the deer park at Benares where the Buddha taught his first sermon was displaced in post-Meiji times by the legend of the kami Takemikatsuchi's arrival on a deer from Kashima. In this example of the *sanja takusen* Kasuga is remarkably similar in appearance to the Chinese god of longevity Shou Lao (J. Jurōjin), one of the popular 'seven good-luck deities' (*shichi fukujin*) worshipped throughout Japan as harbingers of prosperity and happiness. The central figure, Amaterasu, is that of a young woman outlined by the rays of the rising sun and bearing the 'three Imperial Regalia' of jewels, mirror and sword.

Pre-Meiji images of Amaterasu (including those in examples of the *sanja takusen* not illustrated here) show her as a Buddhist figure of male or indeterminate gender, adorned with a *kōhai* (Buddhist halo) and carrying a *hōju* or wish-fulfilling gem. This raises important questions about the provenance of the modern, immediately recognisable image of Amaterasu as a standing, long-haired young female figure dressed in simple white flowing robes and bearing the three Imperial Regalia. Recent research has thrown some light on this question, tracing the development of the current image of Amaterasu since the Muromachi period from the Buddhist figure of Uhō Dōji. A *dōji* (Skt. *kumara*) is a young boy who enters the priesthood; a bodhisattva. Statues and images of Uhō Dōji (see Fig. 3) typically show a long-haired,



Figure 3 Uhō Dōji

standing figure dressed simply in white, carrying a jewelled staff and a wish-fulfilling gem. On his head is a *gorintō* (five-storied tower or stupa), the esoteric Buddhist symbol of the five elements. A form of Uhō Dōji as one of the two attendants of the Bodhisattva Kokūzō (Skt. Ākāśagarbha) was worshipped at the Kongōshōji, a Buddhist mountain temple near the Ise shrines which formed part of the Ise pilgrimage circuit. Encouraged by legends which related the manifestation of Uhō Dōji to the legendary monk and culture-hero Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai), pilgrims to Ise would commonly revere Amaterasu in the form of Uhō Dōji at the Kongōshōji. The statue of Uhō Dōji, which over time and in response to growing awareness of Kokugaku-inspired accounts of Amaterasu had acquired the Imperial Regalia of sword, mirror and a necklace, was removed following the 'dissociation of kami and buddhas' decree of 28 March 1868.⁴²

The *sanja takusen* today

The *sanja takusen* scroll is sufficiently important and well-known to be mentioned in most contemporary Japanese encyclopaedias and historical reference works, but my own experience suggests that few people in Japan today are familiar with the *sanja takusen* motif. The standard form of the scroll was extremely popular in Japan before and especially during the Tokugawa period. In its post-Meiji form it was widely distributed up to 1945 and the post-Meiji version of the scroll is still on sale today. At Ise in November 1996

I was able to purchase a version of the scroll almost identical to that shown in Fig. 2, the only differences being that the 1996 version is larger and printed in colour, and Amaterasu's expression is less stern. Few ordinary people today, however, are able to identify such a scroll as 'a *sanja takusen*.' As we might expect from the history of modern Shinto since 1868, most Japanese people will inevitably regard the scroll as a representation of Amaterasu, the well-known female deity of Ise, with a couple of attendants. The *sanja takusen* is indeed displayed in scroll retailers' catalogues alongside scrolls bearing images of Amaterasu alone or at most of Amaterasu and Toyouke, the deities respectively of the Inner and Outer Shrines of Ise. Most scrolls in these catalogues are of Buddhist subjects. I have seen no example of the 'standard' *sanja takusen* in scroll catalogues and I understand it is no longer printed, although hand-inscribed versions are occasionally made to order. Like many features of the new Meiji Shinto which have survived into the post-war period, the post-Meiji version of the *sanja takusen* shown in Fig. 2 both embodies the ersatz ancientness of nineteenth-century Shinto and at the same time conceals from our view the authentic pre-1868 form of the scroll in which 'Buddhist' and 'Shinto' themes were indistinguishable. Neither the post-Meiji nor the standard version of the scroll is currently available at the Kasuga Taisha in Nara or the Iwashimizu Hachimangū in Kyoto, the two shrines featured in the *sanja takusen* along with Ise.

Conclusions

In recent years a good deal has been written about the transformation of Japanese religiosity which took place around the time of the Meiji restoration. Other chapters in this book make a further contribution to our understanding of the reality of 'Shinto' past and present. Studies of individual shrines and temples have revealed radical discontinuities, mostly dating from the time of the 'separation of kami and buddhas' carried out by a series of government decrees issued by the new Meiji regime. This activity was designed to undermine the powerful position previously enjoyed by Buddhist institutions under the Tokugawa shogunate and to strengthen and unify national consciousness on the basis of a claimed native tradition. It took the form of attacks on Buddhist temples, the desecration of traditional Buddhist iconography and the violent destruction of any Buddhist artefacts found in shrines. Before the Meiji period it was normal for Buddhist priests to be qualified to perform rituals at shrines. After 1868 government support for Buddhism was withdrawn and thousands of Buddhist clergy left the priesthood or reverted to the role of shrine priest, in shrines newly 'cleansed' of Buddhist influences.

In the following decades a new state-sponsored form of Shinto developed out of the 'Great Promulgation Campaign' (*taikyō senpu undō*) of 1870–84.⁴³ The new Shinto, officially 'non-religious' or more accurately 'non-denominational'

(*hi-shūkyō*), took as its focus the figure of the divinised Emperor Meiji, extolled Confucian virtues of loyalty and respect for superiors, and in the first half of the twentieth century developed into the official nation-building, imperialist ideological structure known retrospectively as State Shinto. After 1945, government support and sponsorship of Shinto was removed, but the post-Meiji understanding of Shinto as a national religion focusing on the Inner Shrine of Ise where the sun-goddess Amaterasu, the emperor's ancestor is enshrined, largely remains. Shinto today is often portrayed as an ancient pre-Buddhist Japanese tradition. As this brief study of the *sanja takusen* suggests, much that is distinctive of modern Shinto originated in the late nineteenth century. The 'separation of kami and buddhas' in 1868 marked a radical break with a Japanese religious past in which 'Shinto,' insofar as it existed at all, was understood to be part of Buddhism.

The extent of the discontinuity that emerges between pre- and post-Meiji Japanese religion calls into question the categories of 'Buddhism' and 'Shinto' as used by modern writers and scholars. The categories that we use today to debate issues in Japanese religion acquired their modern meanings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 'separation of kami and buddhas' meant that the *kenmitsu*-style Buddhist past of both the people and their shrines had to be forgotten. Today, both Buddhists and Shintoists in Japan find that it serves their own interests to emphasise their institutional independence from each other, despite the fact that Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are, as ever, attended by the same worshippers. Public and scholarly lack of interest in Shinto in the post-war period and the well-established tendency to idealise and 'orientalise' Buddhism, regarding it as something essential and somehow untouched by its social and religious context, remain prevalent.

In turn, Shinto has to some extent become Buddhism's 'other,' not least among outside observers of Japanese religion. Whatever Buddhism is, it seems, Shinto is not. It has often been suggested in accounts of Japanese religion that Shinto has to do with life while Buddhism deals with death; that Buddhism is rich in iconography while Shinto is aniconic; that Buddhism is doctrinal while Shinto is inherently vague in matters of belief, and so on. Such simplistic oppositions are easily contradicted by observation of the complexities of religious life in Japan. Yet the idea, successfully promulgated by the modernising Meiji regime, that 'Buddhism' and 'Shinto' are – and always have been – separate entities, has become entrenched. Approaching the history of Shinto through the iconography of the *sanja takusen* offers a partial solution to the problem of language. The *sanja takusen*, at least in its standard form, identifies itself as neither 'Buddhist' nor 'Shinto.' It provides us with a window through which to observe Japanese religiosity at different times and in different circumstances. The motif of the three shrines and their oracles has a long and significant history which spans the period before and after the watershed of 1868. The apparent continuity in the appearance of the scroll, which allows us to regard both the pre- and post-Meiji forms as *sanja takusen*, masks radical

changes in content. The changes in the scroll in turn reflect the profound transformation that occurred in Japanese religion and society in the Meiji period under the guise of the 'restoration' of a pre-Buddhist nativist past. Amongst other things, those changes have profoundly affected our own modern understanding of the relationship between 'Shinto' and 'Buddhism' in Japanese history.

Notes

During a research visit to Japan in Autumn 1996 funded by The British Academy I was able to collect many different examples of the *sanja takusen*, only two of which are illustrated here. This chapter constitutes the prolegomenon to a book on the topic to be published by Curzon Press in 2000. I am grateful to many people for assistance and advice in connection with the *sanja takusen* and full acknowledgement will be made in the book-length study. For the present chapter I am particularly indebted to John Breen and Mark Teeuwen for encouragement and advice and to Michiko Sugino for help with translation.

- 1 In some early examples of the *sanja takusen* oracles the Kamo shrine occurs instead of Kasuga, marking a shift in the relative status of the two shrines. In this chapter 'the three shrines' means the shrines now known as Ise Daijingu (Ise), Iwashimizu Hachimangu (Kyoto) and Kasuga Taisha (Nara). There is no connection with the *sanja* in Asakusa in Tokyo.
- 2 In a very few examples I have seen (e.g. in a Yoshida commentary on the *sanja takusen* and in the 1994 *Shintō jiten*) the name and oracle of Amaterasu are on the right, which is another way of indicating priority. In a Meiji period advertisement (found by Michael Pye), the *sanja takusen* figures are shown in mirror-image, with Hachiman on the left. This may be a printer's error or a visual pun – the advertisement is for *hanko* (engraved wooden stamps used for signatures) which are of course cut in reverse.
- 3 Kokugakuin University 1985: 49. This definition focuses on the oracles rather than their medium of dissemination (the scroll). Both are referred to as *sanja takusen*.
- 4 Photographed by courtesy of Mr Maezawa Eiichi of Seikan-do Maezawa Co., Kyoto.
- 5 It is difficult to make any general statements about the relationship between a 'deity' and a 'shrine' in Japan, since the identity, name and conception of the enshrined deity, or as Ashkenazi (1993) prefers, 'moot entity' and its relationship with the divinised shrine vary from shrine to shrine and in different periods of history.
- 6 The Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, founded by Mr Numata Yehan, head of the Mitsutoyo manufacturing company, is best known for its publication *The Teaching of the Buddha*, copies of which are left, like Gideon's Bibles, in hotel rooms throughout East Asia. The following quotation is from Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai 1985: 40, 118.
- 7 This translation is by Norman Havens, based on modern Japanese translations by Kamata Jun'ichi, prepared for the Japanese version of *The World of Shinto*. I will not attempt here a synoptic study of the variants of the standard *sanja takusen* text. Any modern English version is technically another variant, but the important aspect of the standard text is its focus on the mind's purity, honesty and compassion, in contrast to the post-Meiji version.
- 8 Some early examples of *sanja takusen* scrolls contain completely different texts. For example, in the late Kamakura period some Pure Land Buddhist sects (Shinshū and

- Jishū) incorporated the 'three shrines' motif into their teachings. Details of a number of such versions of the *sanja takusen*, whose study falls outside the scope of this paper, are given in Nishida Nagao 1941.
- 9 Shinto scholars at Kōgakkan and Kokugakuin universities regarded both pre- and post-Meiji versions of the scroll as *sanja takusen*. A representative of the Iwashimizu Hachimangū in Kyoto however was keen to differentiate between the post-Meiji scroll shown in Fig. 2 and the 'real' *sanja takusen* of Fig.1 (which gives Iwashimizu Hachiman his own oracle).
 - 10 Aston 1972: 77–83.
 - 11 McCallum 1994: 56.
 - 12 Nakamura 1983: 178.
 - 13 See Grapard 1992.
 - 14 See Teeuwen 1996.
 - 15 Kuroda 1996: 233–70.
 - 16 Grapard 1992: 79–80.
 - 17 Morrell 1973: 457.
 - 18 'Three' in Sino-Japanese thought also represents multiplicity in a way that 'two' does not, so the three shrines in effect symbolise 'the many shrines.' I am indebted to Youxuan Wang for this suggestion.
 - 19 Tyler 1992: 81.
 - 20 *Go-Daigo Tennō gazō* (portrait of Emperor Go-Daigo). Nambokuchō period (1337–92). Property of Shōjōkōji, Shinagawa Prefecture.
 - 21 Sansom 1973: 133.
 - 22 Sansom 1973: 183–4.
 - 23 Mori 1994 and Nagashima 1991.
 - 24 A 'pond of the three shrines' (*sanja no ike*) has recently been excavated and attractively reconstructed in the precincts of the Tōdaiji.
 - 25 Blacker 1975: 75–8.
 - 26 Mori 1994.
 - 27 Nagashima 1991: 51.
 - 28 A major exception might of course be 'the Ise shrine' where the question of which shrine location – Naikū or Gekū – should be the focus of pilgrimage gripped the two shrines in dynamic tension up to 1868 (Teeuwen 1995, 1996).
 - 29 On Yoshida Kanetomo, see also Bernhard Scheid's essay in this volume.
 - 30 See Mori 1994.
 - 31 Ibid.
 - 32 Ibid.
 - 33 Teeuwen 1996: 200.
 - 34 Nagashima 1991: 52.
 - 35 Mori 1994.
 - 36 See Teeuwen 1996.
 - 37 Myōken ('wondrous seeing,' Skt. Sudṛiṣṭi), originally an Indian deity, is the divinised form of the Pole Star or Great Bear constellation, believed to protect the country, avert disaster, lengthen the life span and (because of the name) avert eye diseases. In most cases Myōken was replaced by the officially-favoured *zōka no kami* or 'kami of creation,' three deities from the Age of the Gods referred to in the *Kojiki*. On the Meiji reforms, see the chapter by Breen in this volume.
 - 38 Grapard 1992: 249ff.
 - 39 Hardacre 1989: 83ff.
 - 40 Hardacre 1989: chapter 5.
 - 41 I am grateful to Carmen Blacker for this intriguing suggestion.
 - 42 See Toba 1997a.
 - 43 See Hardacre 1989: chapter 2.